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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001704

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [KU](#) [SA](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: RIVAL SHIA MPS FIND COMMON GROUND ON REGIONAL
ISSUES

REF: BAGHDAD 01537

Classified By: Acting Political Counselor John Fox for reason 1.4 (d).

11. (C) Summary. Influential Shia MPs Qasim Daoud and Jabir Habib Jabir -- both of whom belong to the Shia Unified Iraqi Alliance (UIA) but who hold contrasting views of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki -- share nationalistic viewpoints about Iraq's place in the region. In separate meetings with Poloffs this month, Daoud (who is highly critical of Maliki) and Jabir (who support Maliki) criticized the Kuwaiti government for portraying Iraq as a lingering threat to international security. Both praised the ongoing protests in Iran as a needed swipe against Supreme Leader Khamenei. Daoud and Jabir also agreed that Shia political parties are focused first on possible electoral alliances, and secondarily on how a new national election law can maximize their chances at the polls. Iraqi politics is still inward-looking but, as elections approach, foreign policy may play a more prominent role in the national debate. End summary.

Criticism toward Kuwait, Saudi Arabia

12. (C) Qasim Daoud, leader of the Solidarity Bloc within parliament and one of Prime Minister Maliki's harshest Shia critics, told Poloffs in June that even though he "hates" Maliki, Saudi Arabia has no business stating that it will not normalize relations with Iraq so long as Maliki remains prime minister. Doing so, said Daoud, constitutes interference in Iraq's affairs. Daoud also took a nationalistic tone regarding Kuwait. He questioned why the Kuwaiti government still calls Iraq a threat to international security six years after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein and is blocking Iraq's removal from United Nations Security Council sanctions.

13. (C) Jabir Habib Jabir, a UIA independent and Maliki supporter, told Poloff in June that he voted for the U.S.-Iraq Security Agreement (SA), but unless there are tangible results to remove Iraq from United Nations Chapter 7 sanctions, he will vote "no" for the SA in a referendum and will tell his readership to do the same. (Note. Jabir is a regular columnist for Asharq al-Awsat newspaper. End note.) He claimed the U.S. is taking Kuwait's side on compensation payments for Iraq's invasion in 1990. Jabir warned that unsolved issues with Kuwait and Chapter 7 are tempting wedge issues for ambitious Iraqi politicians to exploit as the January national election nears.

14. (C) Jabir appeared mollified to learn from Poloff that the Embassy is quietly working with Baghdad, Washington, and the UN in New York to implement a plan to remove Iraq from all Chapter 7 sanctions and ease compensation payments. Poloff stressed that the U.S. is committed to fulfilling all aspects of the SA, including Article 25 that deals with helping Iraq restore its full international standing. Poloff also

emphasized the need for Iraq to improve relations with Kuwait, including through appointment of an ambassador, and to address outstanding bilateral issues with its neighbor.

Protests Are Needed Swipe at Khamenei

¶5. (C) Daoud and Jabir told us that the protests in Iran following the disputed national election are good for the Iranian people and the region. Both said the protests are the first public attack against Iran's religious authority and Supreme Leader Khamenei in particular. Daoud speculated that Iraq's young democratic example partly encouraged the Qthat Iraq's young democratic example partly encouraged the Iranian people to protest. Jabir hoped that Iran's turmoil might distract Tehran from pressuring Iraq's Shia parties to coalesce before the January election. Daoud, who just returned from an official visit to Tehran, warned that the Iranian government is reaching out to "everyone" in Iraq by offering numerous invitations to Iraqi officials and MPs. Unlike Saudi Arabia, Tehran treats Iraqi visitors well when they visit, Daoud said, and specifically criticized the Saudis' treatment of Vice President Abd al-Mahdi.

Politicians Focused on Coalition Machinations

¶6. (C) Daoud predicted that parliament is unlikely to move on national election legislation until the "large parties" (i.e. ISCI, IIP, Dawa) come to a resolution regarding their respective electoral alliances. Because alliance formation will be protracted and difficult, Daoud said, he is pessimistic parliament will pass new election legislation,

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and predicted that Iraq would use the 2005 elections law. When pressed about why MPs are focused on electoral alliances first, Daoud said incumbents and party leaders want to first ensure they will keep their seats through backroom negotiations, and only then write the electoral rules in their favor. MPs say they want open lists (ref), he said, but they might be saying that so they are not blamed when parliament ultimately selects closed lists.

¶7. (C) Jabir said he is working "behind the scenes" to help Maliki bring together an electoral alliance based on the State of Law (SOL) coalition he used during provincial elections. Alternatively, ISCI is eager to reconstitute a new Shia-led UIA while Tehran is pressuring all Shia parties (including Maliki's Dawa) to compete under one electoral banner, Jabir claimed. Jabir predicted Maliki would ultimately enter the election campaign with a SOL coalition, opining that the major Shia parties would be unable to agree on the allocation of seats and leadership positions for a reconstituted UIA.

¶8. (C) Meanwhile, parliament remains uncertain about what type of electoral system it will select, Jabir said. Although professing a desire for an "open list" (like the one used in the January provincial elections), he said Shia parties have yet to decide which system to support. Jabir said there is broad agreement there should be multiple constituencies based on governorates. Unlike Daoud, Jabir predicted parliament would pass election legislation before its recess at the end of July. He identified Kurdish MPs as those most favoring a closed-list, single-constituency election.

Comment: Debate on Regional Stature

¶9. (C) The fact that Qasim Daoud, one of PM Maliki's most consistent Shia critics, said he supports Maliki's position on Saudi Arabia and Kuwait is an indication of the growing frustration among Iraqi politicians over Iraq's difficulties with these two neighbors. Despite the flaws and fragility of

Iraq's political system, Daoud and Jabir proudly cited Iraq's democracy as why Arab neighbors should look upon Iraq anew. Iraq's politics is still inward-looking, personality-based, and overly sectarian. But as Iraqis prepare for the national election, foreign policy, including Iraq's relationship with the U.S. and its neighbors, will likely play a growing role in the public debate. End comment.

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